City of Seattle
Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

# Replacing the Crumbling Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall

*Dispelling the Myths*

With a project as complex as replacing the Alaskan Way Viaduct and Seawall, it's easy to get confused. Use the following information to learn the facts and stay informed.

**Myth:** The rebuild is essentially the same size as the existing viaduct.

**Fact:** The current viaduct is 51 feet wide. A new viaduct will have to be 75 feet wide in the midsection and more than 110 feet wide in the Pioneer Square area. To make room for Alaskan Way South, we'd lose five feet of sidewalk along the waterfront. It is not really a rebuild. It is a bigger, elevated freeway along our waterfront.

**Myth:** Building a bigger viaduct would save us money.

**Fact:** Creating a bigger viaduct will cost our region much more in lost economic opportunities. Economic studies show that building a cut and cover tunnel and opening up our waterfront will generate more than a billion in additional tourism dollars. Additionally, the tunnel is a two for one deal – you can replace the ailing seawall at the same time you build the tunnel.

**Myth**: We can begin construction on the bigger viaduct right away and it will take less time to finish.

**Fact:** Construction of a bigger viaduct can start no sooner than the cut and cover tunnel – mid 2008 for utility relocation and 2010 for major construction. Furthermore, construction of a new viaduct can take up to three years longer than the tunnel.

**Myth:** Building a bigger viaduct will have minimal traffic disruption during construction.

**Fact:** In fact, building a new, bigger viaduct will have more impacts because construction will actually last longer.

**Myth:** Building a cut and cover tunnel has more risks than a bigger viaduct.

**Fact:** Both structures are reliant upon the same soils. The cut and cover tunnel goes down 75 feet, while the elevated structure supports will go down approximately 100 feet to ensure that the bigger viaduct doesn't bend.

**Myth:** Some people say we can just fix the existing viaduct.

**Fact:** A team of six independent structural experts have concluded that the existing viaduct is beyond repair. Retrofitting would cost nearly as much as the complete rebuild, but wouldn't last as long and would be less reliable in an earthquake.

**Myth:** A cut and cover tunnel would be great, but we don't have the money.

**Fact:** The core part of the cut and cover tunnel and seawall project can be built for $3 to $3.6 billion. The Washington State Department of Transportation, the Federal Highway Administration and the City of Seattle, have nearly $3.2 billion in committed or pledged funds.

**Myth:** A bigger viaduct can be built without replacing utilities or rebuilding the seawall.

**Fact:** Utility relocation and seawall replacement must occur with either a cut and cover tunnel or a bigger viaduct and have been included in all budget projections.

**Myth:** A bigger viaduct is safer than a cut and cover tunnel during natural disasters.

**Fact:** Tunnels are one of the safest places to be during an earthquake, because the tunnel moves with the earth. All of the tunnels in the Seattle area withstood the Nisqually earthquake unscathed. Tunnels also withstood the 1989 San Francisco quake.

**Myth:** Building a bigger viaduct is better for freight.

**Fact:** The cut and cover tunnel is being designed to accommodate freight. The steepest grade inside the tunnel is less than seven percent. This is equivalent to the West Seattle Bridge, which trucks and buses use all the time.